United Nations A/70/PV.115

General Assembly

Seventieth session

Official Records

115th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 7 September 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Lykketoft ..... (Denmark)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 122 (*continued*)

Strengthening of the United Nations system

The President: Members will recall that the Assembly considered agenda item 122 at its 29th and 30th plenary meetings, held on 12 October 2015. Members will also recall that, under this item, the Assembly adopted resolution 70/3 at its 38th plenary meeting, held on 23 October 2015. Members will further recall that, under this item, the Assembly adopted resolution 70/6, at its 45th plenary meeting, on 3 November 2015.

With regard to this item, delegations may recall that in a letter dated 9 August 2016, I brought to the attention of delegations a request for a formal meeting of the Assembly on the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse.

While the General Assembly has benefited during this session from two informal briefings on this important issue, I agree that the overall significance for the United Nations and the potential impact on the reputation of United Nations peacekeeping activities and beyond warrant continued attention.

In this connection, I would like to propose that the General Assembly hold a debate on this issue under agenda item 122.

If I hear no objection, we shall proceed accordingly.

I am pleased to be able to convene this formal plenary debate of the General Assembly dedicated to a subject of the utmost gravity. Today's debate builds on two informal briefings held in April and May, respectively, which I convened on the subject of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Like all members, I am personally deeply appalled by accounts and reports of sexual abuse and exploitation involving international forces, including United Nations peacekeepers. When allegations point to United Nations personnel or soldiers deployed in United Nations missions whose job it is to protect civilians from harm, then it is particularly deplorable and shameful. As the Secretary-General has said, one terrible act can wipe out a thousand noble sacrifices.

Such acts are, of course, unacceptable under any circumstances, and it is critical that proper and swift accountability be guaranteed and that the needs of victims be appropriately prioritized and addressed. Such accountability will also be welcomed by the United Nations personnel and soldiers around the world who are deeply committed to furthering the values of the United Nations system and whose reputation and integrity are tarnished unfairly by the acts of a few individuals.

Making zero tolerance and zero impunity a reality is the responsibility of the Secretariat, troop-contributing countries, police-contributing countries and other Member States alike. I am glad, therefore, to be able to convene this important debate to assist the United Nations system and Member States in seeking ways

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-27982 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

to collectively act to improve the response to sexual exploitation and abuse.

I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Dabouis (European Union) (*spoke in French*): It is an honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States; the candidate States Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the Stabilization and Association Process country and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; the European Free Trade Association country and member of the European Economic Area Liechtenstein; as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, all of which associate themselves with the following statement.

The European Union and its member States attach great importance to peacekeeping, which is one of the essential missions of the Organization and its main activity. We would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute once again to the hard work and commitment of all United Nations personnel who participate in peacekeeping operations. We also pay tribute to all who have lost their lives in pursuit of peace.

The protection of civilians is at the core of peacekeeping operations. The European Union and its member States have consistently and emphatically expressed their position on sexual exploitation and abuse, and we will reiterate it once more. A single confirmed case of sexual exploitation and abuse is one too many. We have also expressed our outrage after having learned from the Secretary General's February report (A/70/729) that it not only continues to be a major problem throughout the United Nations system but that the number of allegations has risen steadily.

Indeed, we are deeply concerned about the endless allegations. Our message is clear — it all must stop. We commend the Secretary-General's tireless efforts in implementing his zero-tolerance policy for cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, particularly the numerous stipulations on prevention, suppression, corrective measures and support for the victims. We firmly support the Secretary-General in his determination to play a central role in facing this difficult challenge, and we share the concern for ensuring greater transparency and accountability. In that regard, we welcome the specific information heretofore provided. We strongly support the inclusion of the issues of women and peace and security, as well as gender, in the operational planning of peacekeeping operations, especially as it relates to the prevention of and fight against sexual exploitation and abuse.

(*spoke in English*)

Security Council resolution 2272 (2016), aimed at preventing and combating sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers, is a welcome step towards a United Nations-wide approach to ending sexual exploitation and abuse and ensuring that those who commit such crimes are held accountable. General Assembly resolution 70/286, on cross-cutting issues in peacekeeping, was another major step forward in the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse. That resolution addresses the issue in a comprehensive and transparent way and provides the necessary tools to effectively enforce a zero-tolerance policy.

We are very happy that in June the General Assembly agreed to strengthen the Conduct and Discipline Unit at the Department of Field Support. We also believe that the conduct and discipline capacity of individual missions should be further strengthened. In many ways, training is the cornerstone of carrying out peacekeeping mandates. The European Union and its member States underline the importance of United Nations military and police personnel meeting the highest standards of behaviour. It is essential that the training of all peacekeeping personnel include predeployment and in-mission training on human rights, sexual and gender-based violence, preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse, and protection of civilians, especially children.

While the responsibility for prosecution and sanctions for these crimes rests with the Member States compring the troops, police or civilians involved, we have to work together to step up efforts to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, to investigate and take disciplinary action in a timely fashion and to ensure accessible reporting mechanisms and support for the victims.

We welcome the latest report of the Secretary-General (A/71/97), which provides an update on the initiatives undertaken across the United Nations system to combat sexual exploitation and abuse since February 2016. The European Union and its Member States share a zero-tolerance policy and therefore the zero-impunity approach for all civilian, military and police personnel in the United Nations and other international peace operations, as advocated by the Secretary-General.

We have to be committed in the long term to getting more and better-trained peacekeeping personnel into the system, to making sure that allegations are duly investigated and justice is served by the countries that contribute the personnel, and to providing victims with the assistance they require.

Let me conclude by saying that there is nothing more damning to crisis management and peacekeeping than when those whose role it is to advise, mentor, train and protect commit abuses themselves. As we all know, misconduct and abuse destroy lives and undermine the legitimacy of international peacekeeping and the trust of local populations in the United Nations in general.

Ms. Murmokaitė (Lithuania): Mr. President, let me thank you, first of all, for convening this meeting. I have the honour to speak on behalf of Estonia, Latvia and my own country, Lithuania. Our delegations associate themselves with the statement just made on behalf of the European Union (EU).

We are deeply concerned that despite the long-declared United Nations zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse by the United Nations and related personnel, sexual abuses continue to take place. It is appalling that those on a mission to protect civilian populations in crisis can prey on the weakest and most vulnerable, compounding the suffering already inflicted on the victims of conflict. Such behaviour is a dark stain on the conscience of the United Nations. It tarnishes, as the President just said, the good name of thousands of peacekeepers and other United Nations staff who continue to serve in the most difficult of areas, including those who have lost their lives in the line of duty. It also puts at risk the lives of other peacekeepers in the field, since such abuses create mistrust and animosity between peacekeepers and local populations. It is time to stop talking about the problem and act on it with determination and resolve. We all have a role to play in bringing sexual exploitation and abuse to an end.

In that context, we appreciate the dedicated work of Ms. Jane Holl Lute, Special Coordinator on improving United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse. She has a formidable task and deserves our full support and cooperation. Her briefing during an informal General Assembly meeting on 13 May was encouraging and showed determined commitment to tackling the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse. Furthermore, the adoption of Security Council resolution 2272 (2016), the first of its kind, against sexual abuse by peacekeepers earlier this year, was a welcome step. The Council, which mandates peacekeeping operations, has the responsibility for the forces that it sends to the field and must make certain that the resolution is fully implemented.

Problems of sexual abuse and exploitation are not new. Ample recommendations therefore exist on the subject, as do various lessons and good practices that should be shared, analysed and replicated. There are, for example, the systematic predeployment and continuous training of troops and personnel, including on human rights and the protection of civilians; ensuring that force commanders have prior peacekeeping experience; having daily unannounced checks of the locations of contingent members, as India does; the deployment of national investigation officers as part of peacekeeping contingents, as in the case of Morocco, or the establishment of standby teams of national investigation officers, as in the case of South Africa; and the vetting of troops for a history of sexual abuse. A lot depends on the personal leadership and determination of force commanders as in the case of Malawi, which Ms. Lute cited in her May briefing.

Assessing the risk factors associated with every peacekeeping mission is important. Furthermore, as just noted by my EU colleague, the increased numbers of women peacekeepers and police officers, the deployment of women's protection and gender advisers, and human rights and gender awareness training have all proved successful and should be further expanded. It is crucial that all reported allegations be investigated fully and promptly. We welcome the Secretary-General's efforts to speed up the investigations and improve their quality. Viable complaints must be followed up and disciplinary mechanisms must be vigorously established in order to ensure accountability and deter potential perpetrators.

Some countries have conducted trials of abusers, including Egypt, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania and South Africa. That should become a regular practice, not an exception, on the part of the troop- and police-contributing countries (TCCs and PCCs). National jurisdictions, which we all cherish and respect, cannot be allowed to serve as a shield behind which perpetrators of the heinous crimes of sexual exploitation and abuse hide from justice. Assistance should be made available by the United Nations and regional organizations to TCCs and PCCs

in predeployment and on-site training, as well as in developing adequate legal and judiciary instruments to tackle impunity for sexual exploitation and abuse, including through disciplinary actions and criminal accountability measures.

In addition, better dissemination of information among the civilian populations is necessary so that they know their rights and to whom to complain in the case of abuse. Building trust between the United Nations present on the ground and local populations is crucial, so that the victims are not afraid to speak out and are protected from repercussions for speaking out against the abusers. We simply cannot build a case against the abusers if the victims are too afraid to identify those who abused them. Support and assistance to victims should be made a priority, and we welcome the operationalization of the Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

At the same time, the United Nations system needs to change how it views its whistle-blowers. There should be no cover-ups, no deadening silence and no repetition of stories like that of Kathryn Bolkovac, who tried to investigate human trafficking during the peacekeeping mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina and lost her job, or that of Anders Kompass, who was suspended for exposing the sexual abuse of children by peacekeepers in the Central African Republic.

In conclusion, if the United Nations is to regain and retain its credibility and trust, including among those who have suffered or witnessed sexual abuse by United Nations peacekeepers and staff, the latest sexual abuse and exploitation scandal is one too many. It is time to finally make sure that the zero-tolerance policy is not merely a slogan that we repeat, but a comprehensive and vigorous action that we take. It is only through the collective commitment of the United Nations and its Member States that the protection of civilians, justice for victims and accountability for violations of sexual exploitation and abuse can be ensured.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation to you, Sir, for the urgency you have attached to addressing the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse, at the behest of Egypt on behalf of a number of troop-contributing countries.

This debate was convened under agenda item 122, "Strengthening of the United Nations system", because of our concern over the reputation of the United Nations system, its effectiveness and its ability to carry out its role in peacekeeping. Despite the grave sacrifices that have been made by the United Nations and troop-contributing countries over the past 70 years, the heinous allegations concerning a very limited number of those troops require our collective action and response to these crimes on the basis of our shared vision and consensus on how to confront such crimes. In that regard, we must ask the General Assembly to act according to its mandate.

The February 2026 report of the Secretary-General on sexual exploitation and abuse (A/70/729) refers to the increase in allegations in 2015, which numbered 99, including 30 allegations made against United Nations staff members and related personnel; 69 against peacekeeping missions, of which 15 involved staff members of the United Nations Volunteers; and 32 against 49 personnel from troop- and police-contributing countries. These statistics accordingly reflect the fact that peacekeeping operations are responsible for a large percentage of such reported crimes, which the troop-contributing countries condemn and are determined to confront.

Efforts to that end began with the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, where we have reiterated our commitment to the zero-tolerance policy in connection not only with the allegations made against United Nations personnel, but also with all other reports received by the Organization. All discussions carried out among Member States reaffirm that our current and shared vision seeks to prevent the recurrence of this phenomenon. In collaboration with other Member States, Egypt will seek to achieve a comprehensive vision on how the United Nations can address such crimes. Those efforts should be aligned with the basic principles of justice, including the principle of the assumption of innocence before guilt is proven.

The crimes committed by peacekeeping troops represent a true crisis confronting the system in general and hamper their effectiveness. In the context of crisis management, we must address the root causes of this phenomenon, as well as the causes the increase in the number of allegations in recent years. For example, in long-term deployments, such causes may include a lack of entertainment for the troops and the proximity of their camps to civilians' residences. The troop-contributing countries share the responsibility for training their troops and raising awareness with regard

to United Nations policy that criminalizes sexual abuse. We must also ensure that there is no impunity and that we can prosecute those who commit such crimes in line with national laws and by taking responsibility for prosecuting those responsible.

I would also like to mention the vital role played by the Secretariat in maintaining a zero-tolerance policy for such crimes. We must continue our consultations with Member States, including the troop-contributing countries, and encourage the training of troops so we can achieve the objectives we aspire to.

In conclusion, the purpose of this debate is not for us to repeat our national commitments, but for Member States to agree to a joint vision in order to address this important and serious challenge and to identify procedures and measures that can confront those allegations and lead the way to immediate reform. Egypt therefore proposes that the General Assembly adopt a comprehensive framework to establish how the United Nations can address sexual exploitation and abuse at the seventy-first session under this agenda item, which should be included as a permanent item on the agenda of the seventy-first session. Later we can follow up, develop and update those procedures as necessary in implementing the zero-tolerance policy.

Ms. Bahous (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this important debate on one of the most significant aspects of peacekeeping operations and for giving all Member States the chance to take part in it.

Peacekeeping operations have recently been among Jordan's priorities in view of the increasing need for such missions as a result of the growing number of conflicts in various parts of the world. Indeed, sexual exploitation cases resulting from the actions of a few individuals have negatively affected the reputation of the United Nations. We thank those who have upheld the Organization's noble objectives for their efforts. We must also bear in mind that the important resolutions that have been adopted with regard to the protection of citizens, in particular women and girls, should be reflected in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1).

We must all work collectively to identify the necessary deterrents and impose sanctions on those peacekeepers, as well as all other United Nations officials, who commit crimes. It is important to address a number of aspects in order to prevent the recurrence of such acts and to ensure that we are able to effectively implement the procedures and hold those responsible accountable. I would therefore like to focus on the following issues.

First, Jordan would like to stress that all troop-contributing countries should commit to a zero-tolerance policy in cases of sexual exploitation and abuse. We must also respect principles of human rights, protect the dignity of all segments of society, adhere to the noble missions of peacekeeping operations and avoid distorting them.

Secondly, we must act decisively to hold those responsible accountable for their crimes and not effect radical changes in the whole methodology. We should not generalize or lump all peacekeeping troops from the countries of the individuals who committed those actions together with the perpetrators. That will have a negative impact, weaken the mission and have a negative moral effect on the other troops.

Thirdly, it is essential to reorient the training and educational operations of the troops towards respect for human rights and the protection of civilians. It is important that such training be mandatory for those who join United Nations peacekeeping operations. Jordan has established an accredited regional training centre to raise the standards of specialized training for those who join peacekeeping operations, including specialized programmes on how to protect and integrate civilians. In that regard, I stress the importance of integrating women into such operations and the role that can be played by women in peacekeeping. Jordan encourages the deployment of more women in peacekeeping operations in order to provide assistance to girls and women who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Mr. Cardi (Italy), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Fourthly, sexual exploitation falls within the framework of the interests of troop-contributing countries, which are primarily responsible for their troops' behaviour and should carry out peacekeeping-related consultations, especially in cases related to sexual exploitation. Jordan believes that there are aspects of this subject that need more coordination, discussion and analysis, and should include the troop-contributing countries. It stresses the importance of strengthening consultations among these countries, the Secretariat and the Security Council in order to determine how to deal with this subject in all its

forms. We could also design a bilateral memorandum of understanding or a draft resolution in the General Assembly, or consider this topic within the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operatyions, which is responsible for discussing all aspects of peacekeeping and is the most appropriate and comprehensive forum for all members.

Fifthly, troop-contributing countries have the primary responsibility for prosecuting perpetrators of sexual exploitation. We therefore underscore the importance of fighting impunity, including through the enactment and implementation of national legislation to prosecute those who have committed such crimes. We must also take into consideration that national legislation in most countries does not allow such trials to be held in the field, and we must ensure that they are not. We would also like to underscore that we fully support the Secretariat in documenting and prosecuting these violations of humanitarian and international law.

In conclusion, I pay tribute to all the peacekeepers and officers who have served in peacekeeping and express our appreciation for the sacrifices they make every day in these dangerous environments to uphold the highest level of professionalism and maintain peace and security throughout the world.

Mr. Hilale (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this debate following the request made to you by Egypt on behalf of the group of troop-contributing countries, including Morocco. Indeed, my country attaches the highest importance to this issue and therefore welcomes this formal meeting of the General Assembly on sexual exploitation and abuse to reflect together on the appropriate measures to effectively combat this scourge, which tarnishes the imaged of both the Organization and the troop-contributing countries.

We reiterate our strong support for the zero-tolerance policy and are confident in the capacity of our Organization, with the support of its Member States, to effectively implement this policy in order to definitively eradicate this scourge. In that spirit, allow me to share the following aspects.

First, the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse must be approached in a collective and a holistic manner by all stakeholders, including the Security Council, the General Assembly, troop-contributing countries, the Secretariat and even host countries. Everyone has their role to play and responsibilities to assume. We therefore call for true triangular cooperation, which is crucial in order to effectively address this issue. In that regard, troop-contributing countries must be part of the solution and not just part of the problem, as they are today.

In order to define my proposals, I would refer to the guidelines proposed by the Secretary-General following the adoption of Security Council resolution 2272 (2016). These guidelines were given solely to the members of the Security Council. We believe that they should have been shared officially with troop-contributing countries in order to promote transparency and to ensure that they also had been informed of measures that concern them the most. I will not discuss at this time the content of these guidelines, which in certain aspects go beyond what was laid out in resolution 2272 (2016).

Secondly, it is crucial to take a look at all of the references and resolutions on this issue. We now have at our disposal resolution 70/114, on the criminal accountability of United Nations officials and experts on mission, a Fifth Committee resolution and a Security Council resolution, as well as sections of the report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (A/69/19). This does not even include the different independent panels of experts and their reports. This situation requires us to manage a variety of proposals, best practices proposed by the Secretary-General in his annual report and the guidelines included in resolution 2272 (2016). We are also awaiting proposals from the Special Coordinator on improving United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse. We must now coordinate all these efforts in order to avoid confusion, and we believe that the General Assembly is the ideal forum for that.

Thirdly, owing to the worrying increase in sexual exploitation and abuse recently, serious efforts have been undertaken by troop-contributing countries and the Secretariat. It is now time to focus on the deeper causes and to seek appropriate and lasting solutions.

Fourthly, certain fundamental issues must be respected. Troop-contributing countries have the responsibility to manage their troops. We must distinguish between incriminated individuals and their States and we must separate them from their contingents to avoid collective punishment.

Fifthly, through the best practices proposed by the Secretary-General in his report (A/70/729), Morocco commits itself to implementing, as much as possible, all

the proposals mentioned, in particular on the following issues.

First, police and legal officers will be permanently placed in each deployed contingent with instructions to systematically and immediately move towards joint investigations with their United Nations counterparts. Despite this decision, we continue to receive notes verbales requesting us to designate investigators as quickly as possible, even in certain instances in which cases have been closed without follow-up for many years.

Secondly, with regard to assistance and compensation for victims, in the case of criminal trials, compensation is determined by the Moroccan court, but the verdict must be rendered by a definitive and legally binding judgement.

Thirdly, with regard to the other issues, Morocco has the necessary structures and fully collaborates with the United Nations in cases in which these procedures are decided by the competent legal authorities.

Fourthly, with regard to the establishment of a military court on sexual abuse, violations of common law are determined by the criminal code in Moroccan legislation, whose jurisdiction includes ordinary courts but not military courts. Therefore, the establishment of a military court in the field has no legal basis in my country. Its deterrent effect is rendered by a quick judgement within the competent national jurisdiction. The proceedings and the issuance of judgements will be carried out as quickly as possible and communicated to the interested parties, including those in the place where the acts were committed.

Fifthly, I wish to conclude by noting one of the most important aspects that we have already mentioned here, namely, the presumption of innocence. This universal principle is often sacrificed on behalf of the fight against sexual abuse. We have also had the opportunity to clearly express our view of the policy of naming and shaming. The United Nations cannot make public the nationality and identity of the members of the military who have been accused until they have been definitively proven guilty. Moreover, while we await the implementation of this principle, the United Nations must make public the results of the investigations, regardless of whether the individuals are found to be guilty or innocent. We must also recall that Blue Helmets are sacrificing their lives in the service of peace — an ideal that we all defend. We therefore express our admiration and support to them.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to reiterate my delegation's full willingness to cooperate with all stakeholders on this issue, which is fundamental to the image, action and principles of the United Nations.

Mr. Munir (Pakistan): We would like first of all to express our appreciation for the convening of this meeting at the request of Egypt on behalf of a group of troop-contributing countries, including Pakistan.

The scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations peacekeeping missions indeed has a negative bearing on the credibility of the Blue Helmets. The sense of urgency that we see on the subject is therefore greatly appreciated. Our collective aim, of course, is to root out this problem — one that damages the image, as well as the functioning, of a United Nations peacekeeping mission.

We appreciate the earnestness with which the Secretary-General is pursuing his zero-tolerance policy against sexual exploitation by peacekeepers. Pakistan, as a major troop-contributing country, takes its responsibilities as a troop contributor seriously. We therefore fully support the policy of zero tolerance. Protectors of the vulnerable under no circumstances can be allowed to become the abusers. This would be a travesty of justice, of morality and of the sacred covenant that these peacekeepers take. As a troop-contributing country, we have enforced and shall continue to enforce strict discipline if and when such cases surface. The primary responsibility of the respective troop-contributing country to undertake the inquiry and dispense justice must be fully respected.

While addressing the issue, symptoms and causes both need to be addressed. The Secretary-General's report on protective measures against sexual abuse and exploitation (A/70/729) refers to a number of contributing factors leading to sexual exploitation and abuse cases where the Secretariat needs to be vigilant. These include the rehatting of troops and the absence of predeployment training on standards of conduct therein; excessive length of deployment for certain contingents; the living conditions of contingents, including the lack of welfare and communications facilities; and camps in proximity to and not properly separated from the local population.

Of course, that is not designed to justify such criminal and heinous acts. On the contrary, the aim is to undertake all possible preventive measures to reduce the incidence of such cases. Such measures are thus

the shared responsibility of the Secretariat and of all of us. Most TCCs ensure that their troops go through a rigorous predeployment training regime and are made fully aware of their responsibilities regarding the maintenance of conduct and discipline. But in the rare cases where such incidents do happen, we firmly believe that collective punitive action runs counter to the concepts of justice and fair play and merits careful review. In principle, neither Member States nor their contingents can or should be held responsible for an individual's criminality. Similarly, a clear distinction must be maintained between accusation and conviction. Overly intrusive and prescriptive calls on Member States to review their criminal procedures and legislation should also be avoided.

The issue of sexual exploitation and abuse must be addressed collectively and holistically by the wider membership of the United Nations. Since our aim is to find practical solutions, it is essential that troop- and police-contributing countries (PCCs) take an active lead in such discussions and efforts. In that regard, we would like to make the following points.

First, we can adopt an overarching General Assembly resolution that comprehensively addresses sexual exploitation and abuse by combining the work that has been done in various committees, including the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34) and the Fifth Committee. Secondly, it is important to ensure that TCCs are consulted during the process of developing effective guidelines and mechanisms to stem this scourge. Thirdly, trilateral consultations among the Security Council, the Secretariat and TCCs and PCCs would be useful. Fourthly, we continue to believe that the C-34 is the appropriate forum for discussing issues relating to the conduct and discipline of peacekeepers. Lastly, any recommendations should be discussed and analysed in the C-34 in a transparent and inclusive manner.

As a major TCC, we remain fully committed to getting rid of those who are spoiling the reputation of the whole enterprise. We cannot allow the exemplary work of thousands of brave men and women to be sullied by the abhorrent acts of a few.

Ms. Bogyay (Hungary): The international community must not tolerate sexual violence, however it is expressed and wherever and whenever it takes place. We believe that by uniting our efforts there is no question that we can combat sexual violence in conflict situations, emergencies and humanitarian crises.

Hungary declared its commitment to helping to prevent sexual violence at the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, and reconfirmed that commitment by issuing national pledges at the Security Council's October 2015 open debate on women and peace and security (see S/PV.7533). At this point I would like to sincerely thank Egypt, Brazil, Bangladesh, China, Ethiopia, India, Jordan, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan and Rwanda for initiating today's very important meeting.

The international community should pay even more attention than it already does to the issue of sexual violence committed by peacekeepers. Such acts are unacceptable under any circumstances, and we believe in and support the zero-tolerance policy of the United Nations. Furthermore, we should never forget that the goal of the zero-tolerance policy is to have zero cases, since, as is often said, one case is too many. In our view, to achieve that goal we should focus on three pillars for action — first, preventing such acts; secondly, uncovering and investigating them when they occur; and thirdly, ensuring that all perpetrators are held accountable.

From our perspective, it is crystal-clear that the single most important factor is taking very solid measures to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse. It is our common responsibility to ensure that all troops, police and civilians in missions meet the highest standards of behaviour. All troop- and police-contributing countries must provide appropriate predeployment and in-mission training on conduct and discipline, and the United Nations has a vital role to play in helping them to fulfil those requirements. We also firmly believe that empowering women in peacekeeping missions is an essential tool for addressing sexual and gender-based violence and can contribute positively to preventing such crimes in the future. We would therefore like to see more official women peacekeepers and peacemakers strengthening and improving communication in that area.

Once such unforgivable cases have happened, they must be brought to light and properly investigated, since otherwise remedial action cannot be taken and victims will not get the support they need. When it comes to accountability, we must not forget that primary responsibility lies with the States. In that regard, States should work to build the necessary capacities and to

train their investigation officers, prosecutors and judges to effectively investigate crimes and conduct criminal proceedings, with particular regard for the special nature of crimes involving sexual violence and the sensitivities around them. We firmly believe that such crimes must be prosecuted and punished. We strongly support the policy of zero impunity for perpetrators and ensuring the accountability of personnel, whether military, police or civilian. Security Council resolution 2272 (2016) can also help to bring justice to victims as a last resort.

We cannot fail in our efforts to eliminate such crimes. We cannot let the actions of a few erode the heroic work of thousands of United Nations peacemakers. It is imperative to ensure that the international community lives up to its political commitment by taking concrete and measurable actions, and that it remembers the peacekeepers who are doing their jobs so beautifully.

Last but not least, I would like to commend the efforts of the United Nations peacekeepers who strive to bring peace to conflict areas while risking their lives again and again, and whose tireless work is overshadowed by the acts of a minority.

Mr. Stehelin (France) (*spoke in French*): We would first like to thank the President for organizing this meeting at Egypt's request. In view of the fact that the issue goes to the very heart of our Organization's values, and requires the commitment of us all, it is important that we can all come together to deal with it.

In the past, allegations of sexual abuse have been aimed at a number of United Nations peacekeeping operations and international forces. Our goal, affirmed at the highest level, is that of zero tolerance for perpetrators of sexual abuse, regardless of the type of force involved, the colour of their helmets or their uniforms.

I would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate our appreciation for the recent efforts of Ms. Jane Holl Lute, Special Coordinator on improving United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse. That work is vital, because it is designed not only to ensure a broad approach that is not limited to particular situations, but also to improve the effectiveness of the Organization and all its entities by harmonizing procedures.

Within the United Nations, we firmly support making strict implementation of our zero-tolerance policy a priority. In that regard, France, which is a troop contributor to peacekeeping operations, has contributed to the funding of the Office of the Special Coordinator and to putting a senior legal expert at its disposal. The Coordinator's first report included some interesting directions to be taken in the areas of prevention, training peacekeeping personnel, supporting and protecting victims, ensuring transparency and the communication of information, formalizing responses to allegations and, lastly, systematizing best practices. We would like to contribute as much as we can to a number of those efforts as we await the publication of her second report in the next few weeks.

In our view, the issue of the United Nations response to any accusations, on the part of all of its entities, is particularly worthy of further study, as is that of sharing best practices and information. In that regard, it is essential to ensure that the United Nations as a whole acts more quickly to transmit information — which should be as accurate as possible — to the States concerned, so that their national judicial institutions can work completely independently. In addition, the approach to accusations of sexual abuse by the United Nations, including public communications, should be carried out under assurances for the safety of witnesses and the alleged victims, but should also ensure the right to a defence and the normal legal precautionary measures to be observed in the area of criminal law.

For its part, in its national capacity France has already put into effect a series of measures that harmonize with those currently being instituted by the Secretariat. First, with regard to transparency, we have responded to the requests for information from every United Nations entity regarding the serious accusations concerning soldiers deployed in the Central African Republic. We have had numerous and regular discussions with them, both formal and informal. Naturally, they have to be conducted in full respect for the provisions of French criminal procedure that apply to judicial proceedings and that guarantee the fundamental rights of both victims and suspects, in accordance with the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

In the area of prevention, our armed forces have strengthened training on issues related to personnel deployed to overseas operations, all of whom now receive updated and comprehensive training that also meets French standards on United Nations policy aimed at combating sexual abuse. Regarding investigations and establishment of the facts, and in accordance with

Security Council resolution 2272 (2016), our Ministry of Defence is taking the necessary steps, including by deploying national investigative officers, to shorten investigation times. We have the capacity for carrying out independent inquiries wherever French troops are deployed. At the same time, the French judiciary is increasing its exchanges on judicial cooperation with the United Nations. The United Nations must ensure that it transmits all the elements needed for judicial investigations if they are to be carried out successfully, with all possible speed and in full respect for legal guarantees, since we firmly believe that what is crucial for the victims is identifying the perpetrators and rendering them harmless as soon as the facts have been established.

As the French authorities at the highest levels have emphasized publicly on numerous occasions, we are determined to investigate the accusations that have been made against our armed forces as thoroughly as possible. In an address in May to the French military serving in the Central African Republic, President François Hollande reiterated that he had demanded that the truth be established, because, he said, it was a matter of honour for him and for all of France, and he would not allow any stain on the French uniform and flag. If there were perpetrators, he went on, they would be severely punished, but if there were none, the truth must be proclaimed. The French judicial authorities have been seized of the matter and the legal proceedings are under way, in full respect for the independence of the judiciary.

The fight against sexual abuse is a top priority, but it does not mean that we should blame an entire peacekeeping operation, let alone the Blue Helmets as a whole. All of us here know how vital international forces have been and remain to many countries in conflict situations. What was accomplished in the Central African Republic, for example — according to the United Nations itself — was nothing less than the prevention of a pregenocidal situation. Wherever they are, peacekeeping operations deserve our full support. Far from discrediting them, we should be finding concrete ways to improve the protection of civilians everywhere. That should be our collective priority, and I can assure the Assembly that France will continue to make every effort towards it.

Mr. Thöresson (Sweden): I would like to begin by thanking the President for organizing this debate on a very important and urgent matter.

Sweden aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union, but I would like to make four brief points in my national capacity.

First, United Nations personnel, whether troops, police or civilians working under the United Nations flag, represent the highest ideals of the Organization, wherever in the world they are deployed. But in recent years, incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse have seriously undermined the United Nations as a whole. It must therefore be re-emphasized that sexual exploitation or abuse committed by United Nations personnel is a scourge. It raises a question of trust in the United Nations system as a whole, of its credibility and of the ideals it represents. The protectors must never become perpetrators.

And yet it is important to remember that such incidents are not new. We, the international community, must now turn words into deeds and act according to our own zero-tolerance policy on sexual abuse and exploitation. Our response must put the victims first. They must be protected and heard, and all allegations must be taken seriously. All suspected crimes and violations must be properly investigated and their perpetrators brought to justice. Victims must be provided with redress and reparations. Furthermore, it is crucial to apply a gender perspective when analysing a situation on the ground in order to enhance compliance and strengthen protection for individuals.

Secondly, the United Nations system must act as one in the follow-up to any allegations. Mitigating measures must involve all groups of personnel and all relevant offices. The horrible acts of a few have consequences for all the rest. They seriously harm the reputation and security of United Nations personnel and peacekeepers, when the vast majority, of course, do not commit any crimes. Equally, Member States are responsible for ensuring that such allegations are properly investigated and that those responsible are brought to justice. Ensuring that troops, police and civilians are properly trained is equally important in order to prevent such crimes from happening in the first place. The impression of an impunity gap remains a serious problem in the relationship between the United Nations and local communities, and for the overall credibility of our Organization.

Sweden is working actively to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse in a United Nations context.

Capacity-building is crucial, and Sweden trains military police and civilian personnel both from Sweden and from other countries, through the Swedish Armed Forces International Centre and the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations. The issue of sexual exploitation and abuse is also an integrated aspect and key learning objective of the International Police Officer Course, and it is vital to ensure that all police pass that course before deployment. The Swedish police are also putting a primary focus on the issue in the upcoming United Nations police chief training course, and we promote full implementation of the agenda on women and peace and security as a tool for reshaping both peace processes and peacekeeping.

Thirdly, we welcome the leadership of the Secretary-General in implementing his zero-tolerance policy. The enforcement and follow-up of the zero-tolerance policy must be strengthened. The adoption of Security Council resolution 2272 (2016) and the repatriation of troops are important steps. We appreciate the annual report of the Secretary-General, including the introduction of country-specific information (A/70/729).

We also welcome the recent report of the Secretary-General on combating sexual exploitation and abuse (A/71/97). We are looking forward to discussing the report of the Secretary-General in more detail in the Fifth Committee, as well as to continuing to work on the related issues of criminal accountability in the Sixth Committee. In this context, the work of the Special Coordinator is of great importance, and we encourage an extension of the mandate of her Office.

Finally, we all know that many instances of abuse and exploitation go unreported. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that whistleblowers and informants be protected by this Organization. We need to combine efforts to break the silence and combat impunity while improving effective mechanisms for the protection, security and dignity of survivors and witnesses. The United Nations response to dealing with sexual exploitation and abuse has to be effective and forceful.

Mr. Sandoval Mendiolea (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Mexico thanks President Lykketoft for having convened this meeting and appreciates this opportunity to address this important issue in the General Assembly. We acknowledge that sexual exploitation and abuse are unacceptable and constitute serious violations of human rights and international law. When such acts are linked with the Organization's peacekeeping activities, they undermine its legitimacy, good reputation and effectiveness.

Mexico welcomes and supports the renewed and integrated approach focused on human rights that the Secretary-General has recently adopted to confront and prevent these problems. In particular, we believe that it is essential to maintain a zero-tolerance policy in the face of sexual exploitation and abuse by civilian or military members of peacekeeping operations or any other force that has been authorized by the Security Council to act, and to bring to justice those responsible for violations.

With regard to accountability, we support the position that States whose forces are on the lists of the annual reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict and on conflict-related sexual violence should not be authorized to provide contingents to peacekeeping operations until they have been removed from those lists. Similarly, we commend the adoption of Security Council resolution 2272 (2016) and the appointment by the Secretary-General of Ms. Jane Holl Lute as Special Coordinator on improving United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse. The work carried out by Ms. Lute towards achieving a coordinated and comprehensive response to this challenge is crucial. We therefore view with interest the possibility of extending the mandate of her Office in order to guarantee continuity and strengthen the actions that have been initiated.

Despite all this, more than a decade after the United Nations began to systematically tackle this problem, which causes irreparable damage to victims and tarnishes the image and reputation of the Organization, many challenges remain. Regrettably, the United Nations response, in some cases, has not met the expectations of Member States. Mexico believes that the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse cannot be successful without the active participation and commitment of all Member States to cooperate with the United Nations in carrying out comprehensive efforts at all levels to prevent these inadmissible acts from being repeated. In that connection, we stress the joint responsibility of the Secretariat and troop- and police-contributing countries for strengthening training in United Nations standards of conduct and human rights, both predeployment and on the ground, as well as the standards of preselection and systematic background checks for the entire deployed staff. Mexico has assiduously implemented those measures

in its participation in peacekeeping operations where it has deployed personnel.

Mexico agrees that priority must be given to the greater participation of women in peacekeeping operations, because their work helps to promote greater confidence and strengthen the protection of civilians, which lead to better responses to the problem. In the same vein, we must also look at risk factors in order to prevent acts of sexual exploitation and abuse from being committed by United Nations personnel, including by undertaking a review of prolonged rotation periods, recreational activities and programmes for the well-being of the personnel.

Mexico believes that the General Assembly must continue to play a fundamental role in the design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and review of the coordinated actions that the United Nations is undertaking at all levels through the Fourth Committee, the Fifth Committee and the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations. Of special importance are the measures adopted in June by the Fifth Committee, which are key guidelines for the Secretariat on the priorities of Member States to ensure and strengthen the United Nations response to cases of sexual exploitation and abuse.

For all these reasons, Mexico views with interest the possibility of including this topic on the agenda of the General Assembly and having that body continue to address and take systematic actions with regard to this baleful issue.

Mr. Logar (Slovenia): I would like to thank President Lykketoft for coordinating this formal meeting and Egypt for proposing that it be convened under agenda item 122, "Strengthening of the United Nations system".

Slovenia also aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union and, in my national capacity, I would like to make some additional comments.

As stated in the President's letter, the General Assembly has already held two informal briefings followed by an exchange between Member States and the representatives of the Secretariat this year. However, alarming reports of violations of human rights and sexual abuse carried out by individual members of United Nations peacekeeping personnel continue to pose serious concern and cast a shadow on the honourable service and sacrifice of the majority of peacekeepers.

The majority of the victims are women, children and members of other vulnerable groups. Slovenia therefore pays particular attention to the promotion and protection of human rights of these members of our society. At the national level, Slovenia has already adopted several laws and other legal acts that include rules on the notification and investigation of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as on disciplinary, pre-criminal and criminal proceedings in such cases. Slovenia has, in this regard, also put additional emphasis on the importance of proper predeployment training, which includes special courses on topics, such as child protection, women in peacekeeping operations and the protection of civilians.

In addition to existing measures, we have, in accordance with the recently introduced operational guidelines on the implementation of the Security Council resolution 2272 (2016) and selected related measures contained in additional General Assembly documents, immediately taken additional steps to reach our common goal and therefore started issuing required certificates of compliance for our troops to be deployed and have appointed an investigation officer among our already deployed troops in case an investigation would be needed. Slovenia was also among the first countries to endorse the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, which provide a valuable framework to ensure that peacekeepers are better prepared to protect civilians.

Slovenia has consistently advocated that raising awareness on human rights is of the utmost importance. More should be done, and more should be invested in human rights education and the training of those assigned to protect the civilian population at home and abroad.

Acts of sexual exploitation and abuse are not only physical acts but also represent a grave violation of the trust of vulnerable persons by those in a position of authority. The consequences are immense at both the individual and the community levels.

We therefore call on all parties to do more at the national, regional and global levels, individually as well as collectively, to prevent such acts from ever happening again. Implementing a zero-tolerance policy must be our priority.

Ms. Coleman (United States of America): Our thanks go to the President of the General Assembly for having convened this meeting. The United States welcomes this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to addressing the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse and our collective support for the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy and his efforts to strengthen its implementation.

Sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel inflict significant harm on vulnerable communities, the very communities that look to the United Nations for protection and assistance in some of the world's most dangerous places. It also undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of the United Nations.

Several positive efforts have been recently undertaken in this respect. In 2015, the annual report of the Secretary-General on sexual exploitation and abuse (A/69/779) detailed more than 60 initiatives to address prevention, enforcement and remedial action. Almost a year ago, the Secretary-General met with troop- and police-contributing countries to further discuss these measures. Following the release of the report of the External Independent Review Panel on the Central African Republic, the Secretary-General appointed Jane Holl Lute as the Special Coordinator on improving United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse. Her efforts to date in harmonizing the United Nations system's approach to sexual exploitation and abuse have been critical.

This year the Secretary-General also undertook important steps towards increasing transparency and accountability on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse and establish the Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. Member States also took action in the realm of sexual exploitation and abuse. In March, the Security Council adopted resolution 2272 (2016), endorsing the authority of the Secretary-General to hold countries accountable for failing to take appropriate action following allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against their personnel. And in May, the Fifth Committee adopted a cross-cutting peacekeeping resolution that welcomed the determination of the Secretary-General fully to implement a zero-tolerance policy, reaffirm the need for enhanced coordination for victim support and expand the United Nations policy of transparency for allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse.

These all are important steps in the right direction towards accountability, transparency, prevention and victim assistance. Together, these reforms are crucial for upholding zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse, and now that they have been fully integrated into United Nations policies and standard operating procedures, we must move forward; we cannot go back.

Sexual exploitation and abuse is not a problem that can be solved by a single decision or action. Member States and the United Nations together must be constantly vigilant and seek ways to improve the implementation of the letter and the spirit of the zero-tolerance policy. In this regard, we welcome the recent step taken by the United Nations of publishing examples of how troop- and police-contributing countries, Member States more broadly and other international organizations handle allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by sharing national laws, organizational rules and policies and examples of actions taken in response to specific sexual exploitation and abuse allegations. We can identify and build on best practices.

The United States firmly supports the authority of the Secretary-General to implement his zero-tolerance policy and welcomes the initiatives that he has undertaken thus far.

Member States and the United Nations share a joint responsibility to prevent and address sexual exploitation and abuse and to ensure that victims receive the assistance that they need. Today we reaffirm our unanimous position that one substantiated case of sexual exploitation and abuse is one too many and that we all have a collective obligation to address this scourge.

Finally, we must also recommit to protecting whistleblowers, since we know that there remains a significant issue of underreporting of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Mr. Kabentayev (Kazakhstan): Kazakhstan commends the President of the General Assembly for having convened this formal meeting and resolutely joins the United Nations system, other Member States and numerous partners in their efforts to prevent and combat sexual exploitation and abuse.

Despite the progress made, incidents of abuse continue. Therefore, my delegation would like to propose strengthening the following measures, including

protocols, standards, procedures, accountability and remedial measures.

First, sexual exploitation and abuse and other forms of misconduct should be regularly placed on the agenda of the Security Council with troop-contributing countries (TCCs), with rigorous follow-up on all reported cases.

Secondly, TCCs must commit to the six-month timeline for completing investigations and report back to the United Nations on the measures taken in connection with criminal conduct.

Thirdly, we must mobilize an immediate emergency response team of police and medical officers, with a roster of specialists who can travel speedily and also can later provide evidence for investigations by TCCs so as to facilitate prosecution, giving no impunity to offenders. This should be facilitated through information and technology for tracking, abuse mitigation and the vetting of peacekeepers.

Fourthly, we need to strengthen the United Nations comprehensive strategy on assistance and support to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse by providing adequate funding and personnel. The victims of human trafficking and sexual violence should receive full, competent and speedy attention with increased access to health care, psychosocial support, legal assistance and socioeconomic reintegration. It means working with the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and for Children in Armed Conflict, UN-Women, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the network of sexual abuse and exploitation focal points.

Fifthly, the greater participation of well-trained women peacekeepers would also help to improve the overall quality of peacekeeping and protection of women.

We fully support the United Nations zero-tolerance policy for all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse. A gender focus must be intrinsic to promoting human rights, the rule of law, transitional justice and security-sector reform in multidimensional operations. Women should be fully engaged in the processes of conflict prevention and resolution and societal reconstruction, even at the highest levels of peace agreements.

Kazakhstan is currently contributing to the process by fielding highly qualified military observers with gender competence to the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara and the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, and we hope to expand this deployment in future.

As the former Chair and an actively engaged member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Kazakhstan is making a significant contribution to creating conditions conducive to the protection of women by actively working towards the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and other international instruments in the relevant national institutions and legislation, and encouraging women's participation in the political and economic spheres.

Kazakhstan shares with other Member States a deep conviction of the need to uphold the dignity of and respect for women in times of conflict.

Mr. Castro Cordoba (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Costa Rica thanks Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, President of the General Assembly, for convening this formal meeting on sexual exploitation and abuse. Costa Rica maintains its firm support for the Secretary-General in his determination to eradicate cases of sexual exploitation and abuse and his implementation of zero-tolerance policies, and we hold that any confirmed case of sexual exploitation and abuse is unacceptable.

We reiterate our appreciation for all efforts to improve mechanisms for preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and for reducing the time needed to carry out investigations, and to promote public communication and information, educational programmes for employees, and improvements in timeliness and substantive parts of the investigations carried out by national authorities with a view to punishing the perpetrators, when applicable, among other things. We welcome the appointment of Ms. Jane Holl Lute as Special Coordinator on improving United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse, and especially appreciate her openness, communication and accountability towards the membership.

We continue to urge the relevant authorities, countries that contribute troops, police and civilian personnel, and in general all stakeholders to make greater efforts to eradicate cases of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by United Nations personnel, to prevent their recurrence and to not allow their perpetrators to act with impunity. We commend the

work carried out by the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations and welcome its comprehensive report on the situation of peacekeeping operations (see A/70/95). Nevertheless, we regret the delay in its submission to the Member States and the fact that the Secretariat did not accept the entirety of the recommendations contained therein.

Costa Rica, along with other interested and concerned countries as relates to this topic, has followed it closely. We have demanded accountability from Organization authorities, but we have also extended our support so that we could take the necessary measures in the General Assembly to do away with this scourge. We cannot in one breath condemn these acts, and in another, not provide the Organization with the necessary resources and political support to counter them.

The persistence of serious allegations of such acts by peacekeeping personnel; the fact that many cases are still unreported; the lack of assistance to the victims; and the unaccountability, in many cases, of contingent-contributing countries in not investigating charges of sexual exploitation and abuse levelled at their personnel, along with the concomitant obligation to be accountable for such personnel, undermine the implementation of the mandates of peacekeeping operations and the credibility of such operations and of the Organization itself. These abominable acts are in clear violation of the fundamental duty to protect the local population, which they should help, and to which the entire peacekeeping operation personnel is obligated. Moreover, the actions of a few sully the heroic work of the tens of thousands of staff members working towards the principles for which the Organization was created.

We must improve the time needed to carry out investigations. Missions must have more personnel and resources for that purpose, and there must be better tools to obtain the necessary evidence to substantiate cases. Moreover, the Organization and its Member States must duly apply and enforce resolution 70/114, on the criminal accountability of United Nations officials and experts on mission.

We also call on the Secretary-General to implement Security Council resolution 2272 (2016) in its entirety, particularly as it relates to the repatriation of military or police units when there is credible evidence that said unit has committed those types of acts. Any country that does not take the corresponding measures to investigate the allegations against its personnel and is unaccountable in that regard should be replaced and the available evidence in the investigation preserved.

In most cases, the United Nations is the last glimmer of hope for communities and victims. The Organization cannot allow itself to fail at this critical juncture. Additionally, sexual exploitation and abuse cases damage the credibility of peacekeeping operations, a fundamental pillar in the founding of the Organization; they thwart the implementation of its mandates, especially as relates to the protection of civilians; and they tarnish the image of the impartiality of the Organization in the eyes of the local population. All of our efforts to eradicate these cases and avoid impunity should be deterrent in nature so that current and new staff simply do not commit that sort of errors and crimes, and so that the perpetrators of same are punished, rather than, as regrettably occurred in this case, punishing the staff who seek to ensure that the Organization carries out its mandate.

Mr. Zehnder (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like to thank President Lykketoft for convening this debate on such a crucial topic. We are dismayed by the elevated and growing number of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse committed during field missions and by the persistence of the most egregious forms of such acts. The fact that these reprehensible acts and crimes are often insufficiently condemned, and as a result, apparently become even more prevalent only adds to our concern.

In the past month, much attention has been paid to sexual exploitation and abuse committed in the context of peacekeeping operations. It is a problem that affects the entire United Nations system, not only uniformed personnel. Consequently, it is essential to ensure that systemic preventive measures are taken.

We applaud the work of the Special Coordinator. All personnel in every department must be accountable for reprehensible sexual exploitation and abuse. Given the gravity of the problem, the measures taken under the guidance of the Special Coordinator must be long-term and matched by complementary provisions. That is why Switzerland supports extending the Special Coordinator's mandate.

We welcome the recommendations of the Independent Review Panel on the United Nations Response to Allegations of Sexual Abuse by Foreign Military Forces in the Central African Republic. These must be implemented swiftly and relentlessly. In that

connection, my delegation applauds Security Council resolution 2272 (2016).

Despite the measures adopted, it is apparent that much remains to be done to ensure the implementation of the zero-tolerance policy. Every act of sexual exploitation and abuse is one too many and has a devastating effect on its victims for the rest of their lives. The United Nations must ensure that the victims of these types of crimes are provided support. The implementation of the zero-tolerance policy is not only for the United Nations system; it applies equally to all Member States. Only the full cooperation and commitment of Member States can guarantee true accountability. We must all take timely action to investigate allegations as soon as they arise and bring to justice those responsible for these criminal acts. We must inform the Secretary-General of how we have handled allegations of which we have become aware. However, the national legal and policy framework of Member States is often inadequate to address allegations of crimes allegedly committed by foreign nationals abroad or within their own territory. That issue deserves further consideration and must be addressed in all relevant committees. Allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse must be investigated so that the perpetrators of such crimes can be held to account. The United Nations operates within different contexts throughout the world. As a Member State, Switzerland's responsibility is to ensure that the Office of Internal Oversight Services has the necessary means at its disposal so that investigators can be dispatched as quickly as possible.

Finally, we wish to underscore the capital importance of transparency in ensuring the credibility of the United Nations and its efforts to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and ensure that the perpetrators of such acts are held accountable for them. We must not forget that every day millions of people benefit from the work of the Organization. A passive attitude towards sexual exploitation and abuse undermines the credibility of the United Nations in general, and tarnishes the indispensable and remarkable work it does in that area.

Mr. Grant (Canada) (*spoke in French*): I thank the President for having convened this important meeting on the topic of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Canada remains deeply concerned by all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by United Nations personnel, peacekeepers and non-United Nations forces. We welcome the recent initiatives of the Secretary-General and Member States to combat sexual exploitation and abuse. However, we must guard against complacency. A greater sensitivity to sexual abuse and exploitation is not a substitute for the action and momentum needed to solve the problem.

(*spoke in English*)

The United Nations and Member States must first improve transparency on sexual exploitation and abuse, including by providing timely updates on the status of investigations. The lack of information and accountability for the horrific abuses committed in the Central African Republic corrodes the legitimacy of the United Nations. Canada believes that sexual exploitation and abuse can be addressed only through transparency and accountability. That is why we have supported the Secretary-General in his initiative to publicly list troop- and police-contributing countries facing allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. As last year's list has shown, Canada is not immune to sexual exploitation and abuse. We acknowledge that there have been cases involving Canadian peacekeepers. In acknowledging those cases, we commit to be transparent and work constructively to ensure that our peacekeepers are held to the highest standards of conduct.

Secondly, Member States must back their pledges for zero tolerance with concrete and effective action domestically and here at the United Nations, including in bodies such as the Fifth Committee and the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, among others.

Thirdly, the United Nations and its Member States must be more innovative in their approach to assisting victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. For example, the United Nations could consider developing a survivor's charter of rights that would clearly identify United Nations policies, points of contact, updates on investigations and available psycho-social support. Addressing sexual exploitation and abuse is the joint responsibility of the United Nations and Member States, and there are many actions that Member States can take unilaterally to fight sexual exploitation and abuse. Those include better screening, training, legislation, transparency and reporting for all categories of personnel. Member States and the United Nations should also share best practices.

Fourthly, the United Nations and Member States must do more to institutionalize their response to sexual exploitation and abuse. Clearly, sexual exploitation and

abuse are not an issue that will be addressed through small technical fixes or temporary appointments. It requires sustained efforts over the long term by the United Nations and Member States and should be structured and supported accordingly. As a start, the United Nations should consolidate the position of the Special Coordinator on internationalmproving United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse over the long term so as to maintain pressure and momentum in addressing sexual exploitation and abuse.

(*spoke in French*)

In conclusion, Canada believes that much remains to be done to rid the United Nations of the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse. We will continue to engage with the United Nations and Member States to find the means needed to strengthen our collective response.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I thank the President for convening this debate and Egypt for initiating it.

Peacekeepers at their best present the Organization at its best. They shield the oppressed. They provide hope to the hopeless. They help build a more peaceful future, often in the face of great personal danger. For all that, we are all deeply grateful. But peacekeepers who commit sexual exploitation and abuse undermine everything. They harm the very people whom they are meant to protect. They destroy people's lives and futures. In the eyes of the victims and of the world, they destroy the reputation and credibility of the whole Organization. And that is why we must view each and every case of sexual exploitation and abuse as one too many. Twelve new cases have been listed since July, and that is simply unacceptable.

Today's debate is a chance for all Member States, especially all troop- and police-contributing countries, and for the United Nations in general to commit to making that number zero. The Secretary-General has shown his commitment to doing so. I am delighted that his Special Coordinator on improving United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse, Ms. Jane Holl Lute, will take part tomorrow in the discussion on fighting this issue at the United Nations Defence Ministerial Meeting in London. I hope that all troop-contributing countries will work with Ms. Lute and incorporate best practices from around the world into their own military doctrine to stop this scourge.

There are perhaps the beginnings of some modest signs of progress, both from troop-contributing countries and the United Nations. The United Kingdom welcomes the steps taken since February detailed in the Secretary-General's report of 23 June (A/71/97). It is positive that some Member States have carried out investigations into allegations of abuse and are improving their cooperation with the United Nations. Mr. Lute's coordinated efforts to address fragmentation within the United Nations system are also beginning to bear fruit. Many of the recommendations made in the independent report commissioned by the Secretary-General have now been partially or fully implemented. But there is much more that needs to be done.

Each and every one of those 12 new cases painfully illustrates that point. Genuine Member State commitment is needed, particularly when implementing the remaining recommendations of the independent report. We need to up our game, particularly on prevention, transparency of investigations and criminal accountability for offenders. To do so, there are some simple steps that we can take, and we will be discussing those at the London Ministerial tomorrow.

First, all peacekeepers must be fully vetted, trained and equipped before deployment. Secondly, peacekeepers need to know that they will be held accountable if they commit acts of sexual exploitation and abuse. Thirdly, troop-contributing States must have the mechanisms and the will to investigate allegations swiftly and thoroughly, and punish offenders. Finally, victims need to be kept informed of the status and outcome of investigations so that they can see that justice has been done. As my Canadian colleague just said, accountability and transparency go hand in hand.

I am proud to say today that the United Kingdom is committed to all four of those steps. United Kingdom troops receive rigorous predeployment training on sexual exploitation and abuse. They know that they will be held to account for any abuses. I believe that the United Nations and the entire international community are willing to make the same commitment. So let us work together to erradicate the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse for the credibility of peacekeeping missions and, most importantly, for the people they are there to protect.

Ms. Bird (Australia): Put simply, sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers must stop. It exploits the vulnerability of the very people they have been sent

to protect and is a fundamental betrayal of trust. It undermines the credibility of peacekeeping operations and the legitimacy of the United Nations.

The Secretary-General has shown determination to pursue the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. His report on combating sexual exploitation and abuse (A/70/729) demonstrates solid progress in implementing many of the external independent panel's recommendations in ensuring coherence and harmonization through the Special Coordinator on improving United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse and in operationalizing Security Council resolution 2272 (2016).

We welcome the range of initiatives aimed at prevention, victim assistance and accountability. In particular, we support commanders and managers being held responsible for creating an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and abuse; the establishment of a dedicated trust fund for medical, psychosocial and legal services for survivors; and the Secretariat's ongoing follow-up and reporting on the status of sexual exploitation and abuse cases.

There is still work to be done to achieve criminal accountability. Member States have the primary responsibility for investigating and prosecuting crimes committed by their nationals. We support, in principle, the proposal for an international convention that ensures the criminal accountability of United Nations personnel in connection with crimes committed in peacekeeping operations. It would require Member States to exercise their criminal jurisdiction over their nationals participating in United Nations operations. If our commitment to the rule of law is to oe more than rhetoric, Member States must lead by example.

For Australia's part, our military and police personnel deployed to United Nations peacekeeping missions receive predeployment training consistent with Department of Peacekeeping Operations requirements for sexual exploitation and abuse and other protection issues, as well as on ethics, conduct and behaviour. For the past five years, we have included a sexual exploitation and abuse component in our bilateral exercises with Thailand and Indonesia, as well as in all major mobile training teams. We have passed legislation that establishes Australian jurisdiction over serious crimes committed by our nationals overseas, including United Nations peacekeepers and United Nations civilians, which we have shared with the Special Coordinator. We also maintain a stand-by investigative capability able to deploy immediately to commence investigations into alleged criminal or disciplinary offences by military and police personnel in all operations in which we participate.

The United Nations has always stood as a beacon of hope for the world's most vulnerable people. Sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers extinguishes that hope for survivors and their communities. It undermines our efforts to restore peace and security and disrespects the vast majority of peacekeepers who serve honourably. We must have zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse. We must provide survivors with assistance, protection and justice. They deserve nothing less.

Mr. Gafoor (Singapore): I thank Egypt and the other delegations that requested a debate on this important issue.

Let me start with the most obvious, but also the most important point. The increasing number of sexual exploitation and abuse cases has deeply affected the victims, many of whom are women and children. The human cost is high and the suffering of victims is permanent. Equally important, these cases have damaged the credibility of the United Nations and its peace operations.

Unfortunately, sexual exploitation and abuse in peace operations are not new. Since this ugly issue reappeared recently, there have been some significant and positive steps taken by the United Nations. Singapore welcomes the measures taken to strengthen the United Nations zero-tolerance policy, enhance transparency and implement a victim-centred approach. However, much remains to be done. We have to act swiftly, but also act in a coordinated and comprehensive manner. In this regard, I wish to make five points.

First, we welcome the steps taken to enforce the United Nations zero-tolerance policy. These include immediate response teams in peace operations, as well as community-based complaint mechanisms. Earlier this year, Security Council resolution 2272 (2016) endorsed the decision of the Secretary-General to repatriate contingents where there has been credible evidence of widespread or systematic abuse. We commend it, as well the efforts of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, under the leadership of Under-Secretary-General Ms. Heidi Mendoza. We hope the

next Secretary-General will continue to attach the greatest priority to this issue.

My second point is that we in Singapore support efforts made by many troop- and police-contributing countries who have stepped up their coordination with the United Nations. National investigation officers are now being deployed more swiftly when allegations arise. Many of the contributing countries have expedited their investigations. We commend them, as well the Secretariat's initiative to compile and highlight best practices. This will help us to learn from one another. Close and continued cooperation between the United Nations and contributing countries is crucial to solving this problem.

My third point is that we must build a culture of responsibility and accountability within every United Nations peace operation. The United Nations cannot champion the rule of law if its representatives break the law, or worse, if they allow abuses to go unaddressed. Building a culture of accountability begins with individuals. In this regard, we are pleased that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support have worked with troop-contributing countries to strengthen and expand predeployment training. The Department of Field Support has begun to use its Misconduct Tracking System to vet troops. Singapore also welcomes the strengthened reporting framework for allegations and investigations and the move towards greater public transparency. In our view, more sunlight in dark corners is good because it will ensure that there is no tolerance and no hiding of such heinous crimes. We urge the next Secretary-General, when he or she is appointed, to continue building a culture of responsibility and accountability.

My fourth point is that there must be a system-wide approach to addressing sexual exploitation and abuse. I was distressed recently when I read of one independent report that said that allegations were passed from "desk to desk and inbox to inbox". Victims are not files or e-mails. They are human beings. The United Nations needs to make sure that every allegation is investigated and no one falls through the cracks.

In that regard, Singapore welcomes the appointment of Ms. Jane Holl Lute as Special Coordinator on improving United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse. Her work has been important in analysing the problem and homing in on key issues. The system-wide working group that she chairs will bring coherence and coordination to the United Nations response. The high-level steering group on sexual abuse and gender-based violence will also keep senior management's attention squarely focused on the problem. We are confident that Ms. Lute will help to plug the gaps and ensure that the United Nations pursues justice from start to finish.

My fifth and final point is that the fight to eradicate sexual exploitation and abuse must be a continuing one. All Member States and the Secretariat must work together to continually monitor and improve the Organization's frameworks. We must also ask whether existing policies are adequate, whether peace operations have controls in place and whether there are enough investigators, both at Headquarters and in the field. We should remember that the improvements we have made are not for their own sake. They are there in order to make a difference to the most vulnerable and to uphold the name, reputation, credibility and integrity of the United Nations.

Mr. Tuy (Cambodia): I would first like to express our appreciation to the President for convening today's important meeting on the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse under agenda item 122, "Strengthening of the United Nations system".

Sexual exploitation and abuse is an ongoing threat that undermines the heroic work of tens of thousands of United Nations peacekeepers and personnel. It affects the implementation of peacekeeping mandates as well as the credibility of United Nations peacekeeping. According to the February report of the Secretary-General (A/70/729), the total number of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping missions in 2015 was 69, while the number for 2016 has already reached 44. Such figures show that we must all ensure that the actions of a few do not tarnish the achievements of others in peacekeeping operations.

The Royal Government of Cambodia shares the concern about the serious and continuing allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse both by United Nations peacekeepers and non-United Nations forces. We would like to emphasize that such acts, whoever commits them, are unacceptable under any circumstances, and that it is absolutely critical to ensure that accountability is appropriate and swift and that addressing the victims' immediate needs is a priority. Cambodia, along with 13 other troop-contributing countries, has been

commended by the Under-Secretary-General for Field Support for its ethical peacekeeping performance. The Government of Cambodia fully supports the Secretary-General's continued efforts to implement and reinforce the zero-tolerance policy of the United Nations on sexual exploitation and abuse, and specifically those aimed at strengthening mechanisms for prevention, reporting, enforcement and remedial action so as to promote greater accountability.

Cambodia's National Centre for Peacekeeping has been actively conducting training sessions for its personnel on United Nations peacekeeping conduct and discipline and on respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, culture and laws of host countries before deployments to mission areas. In that regard, Cambodia calls on Member States to join with the United Nations in taking concrete steps to prevent and combat sexual exploitation and abuse and to ensure that those who commit such crimes are held legally accountable.

My delegation would also like to express its profound solidarity with all victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, and to urge the United Nations and Member States to make such victims' well-being a priority by taking all necessary measures to provide them with adequate support and assistance.

Mr. Sauer (Finland): Finland aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union.

I would like to join previous speakers in thanking the President for organizing today's formal debate, as well as the group of important troop-contributing countries for their initiative.

Sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations field operations has been in the headlines too often in the last few years. It is simply unacceptable when United Nations personnel, whether civilian or military, abuse the people they are sent to protect. Cases of sexual exploitation and abuse undermine the effectiveness of the United Nations in the field and pose a serious threat to its reputation and credibility.

Where sexual exploitation and abuse are concerned, we should pay equal attention to prevention, to ensuring accountability through timely investigations and appropriate judicial proceedings and to supporting the victims. And we must take the political, legal, administrative and financial aspects of all those areas into account. The multifaceted nature of sexual exploitation and abuse makes it a challenging subject in the context of the United Nations. A number of different committees, as well as the Security Council, deal with different aspects of it. There are multiple actors and responsibilities involved, with many reporting lines and different forms of accountability. Today's debate is a useful opportunity to take comprehensive stock of the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse.

We welcome the increased attention that the Secretary-General and senior management have given to the persistent problem of sexual exploitation and abuse over the past year, as well as the active involvement in the issue of the membership of the United Nations, both in the General Assembly and the Security Council. Important steps have been taken, such as the adoption of Security Council resolution 2272 (2016) and the Fifth Committee's cross-cutting resolution, adopted by the General Assembly as resolution 70/286. I would like to highlight four key areas where progress has been made in the past year but a lot of work is still needed.

First is a strengthened commitment to our zero-tolerance policy, since further effort is needed to ensure that zero tolerance becomes a zero-case reality. That is a joint responsibility of the Secretariat and troop-contributing Member States. Second is a shared responsibility for reacting promptly to all allegations directed at United Nations-mandated operations and United Nations entities, whether they concern civilians, uniformed personnel, the staff of United Nations funds and programmes or subcontractors. The third is the importance of system-wide cooperation. Ms. Jane Holl Lute, Special Coordinator on improving United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse, has played an important role in that regard, and we thank her for her work. Lastly, there is the area of support to victims, where the trust fund is one important step but for which a more comprehensive approach is also required. It is also vital that we address the systemic issues, fragmentation and other weaknesses — including discrepancies in attitudes — in the United Nations system, in order to strengthen its response not only to sexual exploitation and abuse but also to other forms of accountability deficits.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the Assembly of my delegation's firm commitment to doing its utmost to prevent and combat further cases of sexual exploitation and abuse both nationally and at the level of the United Nations. Even one case of sexual exploitation and abuse is too many.

Mr. Minami (Japan): I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to President Lykketoft for having convened this important meeting.

It is regrettable that we continue to hear allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. We must cooperate in addressing these heinous acts, which have significantly damaged the credibility of the United Nations.

Security Council resolution 2272 (2016) reaffirms the zero-tolerance policy adopted by the Secretary-General and sets out concrete measures to be taken in order to combat sexual exploitation and abuse. I would like to reiterate Japan's full support for the resolution and its implementation.

In the implementation of the resolution, it is essential to coordinate the efforts of all Member States, including troop-contributing countries (TCCs) and police-contributing countries (PCCs). Without the understanding and cooperation of TCCs and PCCs, any measures we take will fall short. In this regard, I commend the efforts made by the President of General Assembly, who convened several briefings on sexual exploitation and abuse this year that deepened understanding among Member States.

One area Japan has supported is the United Nations e-learning programme on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. Training materials have been recently established for this purpose. I would like to emphasize that this programme can be effective only when trainees, including personnel provided by TCCs/PCCs, understand its objective and are proactively involved. As laid out in resolution 2272 (2016), robust predeployment training is essential, and it is vitally important for us to expand understanding among TCCs and PCCs. For this reason, Japan and the United Nations Department of Field Support will jointly hold an event to introduce the training materials next week, on 13 September. This will be the first opportunity to showcase the material before Member States. Japan strongly backs this effort as part of the effective implementation of the resolution, and I look forward to seeing as many colleagues as possible there.

Japan places central importance on the provision of assistance to victims, an area covered by resolution 2272 (2016). All Member States should consider what they can do to help victims. Just one year ago, Prime Minister Abe of Japan expressed Japan's commitment to providing support for a remedial action programme for victims of sexual exploitation and abuse at the second Leaders' Summit on Peacekeeping, held here in New York. Japan is announcing its concrete contribution at the United Nations Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial in London and encourages other Member States to join us.

Japan has also taken additional measures to support the implementation of the resolution. For instance, we designated a national investigation officer in our troops deployed to South Sudan in response to a request by the Secretariat.

Peacekeepers are the last hope for people suffering on the ground. It is unacceptable for peacekeepers to betray people's trust through sexual exploitation and abuse. It is equally unacceptable for such acts by certain peacekeepers to tarnish the honour of the vast majority of peacekeepers, who are serving earnestly and under difficult circumstances.

I strongly believe that we must all work together in tackling sexual exploitation and abuse through concrete measures such as those I have described today, for the sake of both the victims and the United Nations.

Mr. Nayan (Philippines): The Philippines wishes to commend President Lykketoft for having organized today's debate on the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping operations under agenda item 122, "Strengthening of the United Nations system".

I wish to recall the remarks of the Secretary-General made at a ceremony in observance of the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers in May, during which he said that peacekeeping remains the flagship agenda of the United Nations enterprise.

It is therefore imperative that issues that undermine this flagship agenda, such as sexual exploitation and abuse, be given continued attention. We laud the efforts of the Secretary-General, through Ms. Jane Holl Lute, Special Coordinator on improving United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse, and her team for pursuing vigorously the task of curbing this scourge and rebuilding the trust of the communities affected.

Early this year, from the General Assembly high-level thematic debate on peace and security, to the high-level seminar on United Nations peace operations and at least two General Assembly informal briefing sessions, the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse was discussed extensively. This issue not only undermines the values and principles of the United Nations, but also erodes the trust of the peoples we have vowed to

protect. It is inexcusable. It is unacceptable. It has no place in the United Nations system.

Viewed in the context of the protection-of-civilians mandate of United Nations peacekeeping operations, this critical issue must be addressed aggressively through the following: first, robust predeployment and in-mission training programmes that underscore leadership responsibility and accountability throughout the chain of command; secondly, appropriate information exchange on context-specific responses to sexual exploitation and abuse cases; and, thirdly, innovative capacity-building initiatives based on best practices in overcoming a culture of impunity.

Proud of its peacekeeping tradition for more than 50 years in 15 countries and territories, the Philippines reiterates its strong and unequivocal support for the United Nations zero-tolerance policy to combat sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping operations and missions. One case of sexual exploitation and abuse is one too many, tarnishes the Organization's image and does a great disservice to our brave and honourable peacekeepers who have made the ultimate sacrifice for the cause of peace. The Philippines is strongly committed to ending sexual violence whenever and wherever it occurs, and we will hold our troops accountable to the highest standards of conduct.

The Philippines, now more than ever, stands in solidarity with other States Members of the United Nations to work together to protect the good name of United Nations peacekeeping and uphold the trust of the people.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): Italy aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union and would like to add the following remarks in its national capacity.

Italy is the main troop and police contributor to peacekeeping operations in the Group of Western European and Other States. We are also among the original subscribers to the Kigali Declaration on the Protection of Civilians. In essence, we attach the utmost importance to peacekeeping operations and their stabilizing effects. I reiterate Italy's full support for the zero-tolerance policy against sexual exploitation and abuse, in particular the various proposals on prevention, enforcement and remedial action for that scourge. We very much welcome the adoption of Security Council resolution 2272 (2016), General Assembly resolution 70/286 and the strengthening of the Conduct and Discipline Unit within the Department of Field Support.

We strongly believe in the importance of predeployment training to carry out peacekeeping mandates. In that regard, Italy's Carabinieri Corps has developed unique training capacities in that specific field through programmes offered by the Center of Excellence for Stability Police Units (CoESPU), based in Vicenza, Italy, which has, to date, trained almost 9,000 units from 98 different countries. Every CoESPU course provides specific modules on operators' code of conduct, gender mainstreaming and combating sexual exploitation and abuse, and additionally offers other training activities, such as the protection of civilians, in order to instil an understanding among military personnel of the operational concept of civilian protection. There are training activities for United Nations formed police units to be deployed to a theatre of operations, for international military police to serve in deployed units and other classes on the basics of combating violence towards vulnerable people in crisis areas.

Due to the growing need that has been underlined, inter alia, by Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent documents, up to and including Council resolution 2272 (2016), to provide the best tools to personnel deployed in peacekeeping missions in order to enable them to appropriately address issues regarding vulnerable populations, CoESPU launched a course in 2014 on gender protection in peace-support operations. The purposes of the programme are to teach peace-support staff about the difficulties faced by vulnerable people and how to combat discrimination against them; best practices in the field; and skills for investigating cases of sexual violence and the human slave trade.

To that end, the Vicenza Centre has hired a gender and child protection adviser, who trains peace operators about gender-related issues before their deployment. The course on gender protection, started in 2014, has been offered four times. The fifth iteration will begin in early 2017. Aside from these specific courses, all of the programme offerings at the Vicenza centre provide training modules on gender protection.

To conclude, sexual exploitation and abuse has the potential to undermine the legitimacy and credibility of this very Organization if we do not act now with resolve to implement the zero-tolerance policy and allow zero

impunity for all personnel in the United Nations and other international peace operations that have been committing such heinous acts. Now more than ever, we need to redouble national and United Nations efforts to stop and properly punish such acts.

Ms. Pedros Carretero (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. I will limit my remarks to a few considerations on behalf of Spain.

I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for having convened this plenary meeting on a sensitive topic that requires the firm commitment of the entire membership. The international community must respond to events that tarnish the credibility and legitimacy of the United Nations and that undermine the commendable work of its peace missions. We would also like to publicly thank the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator on improving United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse for the consultations of recent months aimed at identifying best practices in the field.

We would highlight that Spain, as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, actively supported Security Council resolution 2272 (2016), which seeks to prevent and combat sexual exploitation and abuse by personnel deployed on peace missions. It is the first Council resolution that is wholly and exclusively dedicated to that topic. Through its adoption, the international community sends a clear message to perpetrators of such acts.

As previous speakers have mentioned, we must act jointly if we are to successfully address the problem. Troop- and police-contributing countries are primarily responsible for their deployed uniformed personnel in the Secretariat and in the host country. All contributing countries must implement the appropriate measures to ensure that the necessary investigations are being carried out and that the perpetrators are brought to justice and sanctioned accordingly as quickly as possible.

I would like to stress that cases of sexual exploitation and abuse can occur in any contingent. We must not single out countries that promptly and diligently conduct investigation and promote accountability for those responsible for individual acts. Quite the contrary, we must praise troop- and police-contributing countries with robust preventive measures that investigate and prosecute their nationals when there is reasonable cause to do so. In our view, there are several key elements in the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse.

First, we must all bolster prevention through robust predeployment training with the backing of the United Nations. We especially support the human rights screening policy that prevents deploying personnel who have a record of sexual exploitation and abuse. As we have pointed out on several occasions, Spain promotes gender mainstreaming and incorporating perspectives of women, peace and security in the operational work of peace missions as key preventive measures. We particularly support the development of a new strategy to reward greater participation of women among United Nations military personnel with a view to doubling the current rate over the next few years, in line with Council resolution 2242 (2015). The greater participation of women in peace missions is, in and of itself, a preventive measure that will garner the trust of victims in denouncing possible abuse at the hands of mission personnel. We are concerned that many cases go unreported.

In addition, we must adopt urgent measures to set a maximum — I repeat, maximum — period of six months to investigate allegations and enforce the appropriate punishments and disciplinary measures if the facts are borne out. We must develop the proper protocol to support victims by guaranteeing confidentiality, minimizing trauma stemming from the numerous interviews to be conducted by United Nations staff and ensuring access to medical and psychosocial assistance. We promote transparency following formal allegations through monitoring the subsequent process, including any action taken as a result of the findings.

My delegation wishes to take this opportunity to reiterate our firm support for the Secretary-General's ongoing efforts to implement his zero-tolerance policy, and we welcome the various measures proposed in his recent reports. In that connection, we take note of the operational guide distributed in June regarding the implementation of Council resolution 2272 (2016).

I would be remiss if I did not briefly mention the measures being implemented in Spain that seek to reduce the prevalence of sexual exploitation and abuse. Our Ministry of Defence is offering an international course entitled "Comprehensive approach to gender mainstreaming in operations". To date, 16 international courses have been held in Europe and Africa. Similarly, gender awareness in operations has been part and

parcel of Spain's armed forces since 2011. Each troop deployment has a designated gender adviser officer who is also the focal point for issues related to sexual exploitation and abuse. Moreover, the President of Spain, at the high-level Security Council debate in October 2015 (S/PV.7533), which resulted in the adoption of resolution 2242 (2015), made the following pledges regarding sexual exploitation: to ensure that all recruiting and training courses for the armed forces include special training on Council resolution 1325 (2000) and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse; to encourage that all first- and second-tier commanders who participate in international missions and operations receive specific training in that area; and lastly, to launch a virtual course on gender in the context of operations before October 2016.

Finally, our armed forces are working on implementing other solutions of a more general character. Among others, we are trying to reduce the time spent by troops on the ground, encourage the promotion of force commanders with recognized experience in that area, reinforce self-policing among the troops and improve communication between the civilian community and potential victims. Our message is short and clear — there are civilians who are victims of sexual exploitation and abuse at the hands of others, and they must be assured protection. These victims have names. The least that they deserve is the swift reaction of the international community and our attentive follow-up.

Ms. Pereira Sotomayor (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Ecuador welcomes the convening of this debate as a platform for addressing, in a transparent and determined manner, the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by peacekeeping operations personnel dispatched and authorized by the United Nations. At the same time, Ecuador recognizes the importance of United Nations peacekeeping operations and the commendable work carried out by the troop and police contingents deployed in those operations, as well as by the civilian personnel of the Organization.

We must consider that, for many people living in countries affected by conflict, the only contact they might have with the United Nations would be precisely with a soldier from a peace mission, which is to say that soldiers serving under the flag of the United Nations have an additional responsibility. The reprehensible events that occurred in the Central African Republic in 2015, unleashing a major uproar because they involved a vulnerable part of the population, evidenced the Organization's lack of action and failure to implement appropriate measures to prevent and end the commission of acts of sexual abuse, which, on the contrary, became a recurring practice. The reaction of the international community and the impact on the credibility of United Nations peace operations were a warning for the United Nations to handle this sensitive issue with greater commitment so as to ensure the prevention and prosecution of such acts.

Since that time, there have been several positive developments. The publication in December 2015 of the report entitled "Taking action on sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers", prepared by an independent Panel of Experts appointed by the Secretary-General, established one of the regulatory frameworks for addressing cases of sexual exploitation and abuse. This framework is derived from the United Nations mandate for the protection of human rights, which is rooted in the Preamble of the Charter of the United Nations, wherein lies the urgency for the United Nations to accord the same importance to the cause of human rights as it does to issues of security and development, particularly on behalf of vulnerable populations in which women and children are mostly affected. At the same time, that requires greater coherence and coordination among the various competent intergovernmental agencies of the United Nations system, for it is a matter of ensuring civilians among whom the Blue Helmets are deployed that their human rights, which have already been impacted by the tragedy of conflict, will be respected and protected.

Ecuador shoulders its responsibility as a troop-contributing country to peacekeeping operations. We hope that, after this debate, the various reflections that it has engendered will promote acceptance of the recommendations of the Secretary-General contained in his latest report (A/71/97) in order to further the implementation of the zero-tolerance policy and the Security Council's call to fight impunity and prosecute those guilty of sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping operations.

Mr. García Moritán (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank President Lykketoft and the countries that asked for the convening of this debate, which gives us the opportunity to discuss a challenge whose solution is essential to the future of peacekeeping missions and the image of the United Nations in general.

Argentina expresses its ongoing and tireless support for the zero-tolerance policy of the Secretary-General in addressing sexual exploitation and abuse and its implementation in all peacekeeping operations in connection with military, police and civilian personnel. Dismayed by the ongoing cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, we believe that we must provide the Organization with effective means to prevent and punish such acts committed by United Nations personnel against people whose protection has been entrusted to them — acts that are in flagrant contravention of the mandates of the Organization.

In that regard, we must pursue the implementation of the programme of action proposed by the Secretary-General in two previous reports on sexual exploitation and abuse, as embodied by the respective relevant resolutions of the General Assembly. Such measures will have to be harmonized with those of the Security Council, which we have also supported. Accordingly, we believe that the idea of including the topic as an item on the agenda of the General Assembly could be considered. In such an instance, we would need to agree on concerting our efforts in order to avoid duplication, so that the Organization could rely on a coherent, coordinated and unified view on this sensitive subject.

The situation is serious. As has been said, one case is one too many, and we must move away from a zero-tolerance policy to zero in the number of cases. Accordingly, we have welcomed the appointment of the Special Coordinator on improving United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse, Ms. Jane Holl Lute. In line with the current changes under way within the Organization to encourage prevention and protection, the measures to be implemented will have to cover not only punishing those who have been found guilty, thereby avoiding impunity, but also preventing crimes associated with sexual exploitation and abuse and sheltering victims from these crimes. Zero tolerance is essential, of course, but establishing the maximum level of prevention and the protection of victims is also key.

In line with that concern, for the past several years the Argentine Joint Peacekeeping Operations Training Centre of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Argentina has offered cross-cutting courses addressing gender issues in the context of peacekeeping operations, and in particular the prevention of acts of sexual exploitation and abuse. These courses have been conducted by Argentine troops deployed and to be deployed in peacekeeping operations, as well as by troops from other countries who regularly train at the Argentine Training Centre.

In the same vein, we welcome the establishment of the Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. Concerning preventive measures and as has been recognized by the General Assembly, we must address the risk factors associated with crimes of sexual exploitation and abuse, including longer periods of troop rotations of contingents, the lack of training on standards of conduct and the living conditions of troops, among others.

The fight against abuse and sexual exploitation in peacekeeping missions is a fundamental task that involves us all and in no way can be allowed to fall prey to the logic of the various bodies or negotiating groups of the Organization. We therefore call for greater cooperation and mutual understanding between the Secretariat, the Security Council and the General Assembly, particularly the troop- and police-contributing countries, in order to engineer and support the necessary measures aimed at their success.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would first like to thank the President for convening today's meeting on such an important topic.

I would like to begin by reaffirming that Uruguay, as a troop-contributing country with a long history of involvement in various peacekeeping operations, considers combating cases of sexual exploitation and abuse to be a very serious issue, and in that regard is firmly committed to the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on such cases. We would also like to emphasize how important it is that policies relating to the matter are always developed in consultation with the troop- and police-contributing countries and that their viewpoints are taken into account.

Those who commit acts of sexual exploitation and abuse are reprehensible in every way, because they are betraying and exploiting the trust of people they should be protecting, in clear violation of the mandate under which they are deployed. I would like to emphasize that in order to deal with such cases, Uruguay, as a troop-contributing country, has been working continually to make progress on improving prevention through pre-deployment training, proper controls on the ground and capable leadership at every level. The Government of Uruguay has adopted provisions that cover accountability for those responsible and support

for the victims, in an affirmation of its commitment to human rights and the dignity of victims. I would like to mention some of the measures we have taken to advance the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse.

All members of national contingents must pass a predeployment course taught by professionals from outside the armed forces, with the participation of the United Nations country office, on human rights, international humanitarian law and policies on sexual exploitation and abuse, gender and the protection of children. All members must sign a predeployment affidavit acknowledging that they have received instruction on those subjects, accepting responsibility if they violate them, and authorizing a deduction from their salaries for the costs associated with their disciplinary repatriation.

Every national contingent is deployed by a national investigative officer who is qualified and trained to carry out any investigations needed in situations when allegations are made against any member of the contingent. Every battalion-level or comparable unit of a national contingent is deployed with a specially trained officer designated an examining magistrate by the courts martial. That means that in cases of complaints of sexual exploitation or abuse for which an investigation determines that a member of the contingent is responsible, the unit commander can submit the case to a court martial. The court will then initiate action through the aforementioned magistrate, who will represent, delegate for and carry out direct orders from the military judge assigned to the case. Such measures ensure that the examining magistrates can act independently of the military commanders and that they can collect the information and evidence needed to ensure that the judiciary, within a framework of due process, can do its work quickly and effectively.

Uruguay has communicated — to the United Nations and to the authorities on the ground where Uruguayan contingents are deployed to missions — the contact information for a Ministry of Foreign Affairs focal point, which victims, or their legal representatives, in possible cases of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by Uruguayan troops, including paternity cases, can contact in order to get advice on the procedures for exercising their rights under Uruguay's legal system and their eligibility.

Uruguay's Ministry of National Defence has established a protocol designed to ensure optimal results in the procedures to be followed, starting when a potential case of sexual exploitation and abuse comes to light and continuing until it is resolved, including by instituting appropriate measures for those responsible and providing advice to victims and their legal representatives to enable them to obtain their rights under national law. A number of the additional measures adopted regarding the responsibilities of the troops deployed in peacekeeping operations have also helped to ensure that in many investigations DNA evidence has been taken from the accused that in some cases has enabled their paternity to be confirmed. The Uruguayan Government has also assigned the aforementioned focal point in support of victims who are mothers in proceedings resulting from paternity issues.

Uruguay is seriously concerned about the negative impact of such cases on the credibility and image of peacekeeping operations and on their ability to carry out their mandates, but we are especially worried about the fact that within the broad range of behaviours that can be considered to be cases of sexual exploitation and abuse involving military, police or civilian personnel, those responsible are guilty of unacceptable behaviour and, while many such cases may involve violations of human rights, all involve an assault on the victims' dignity. It is unfortunate that such cases end by tainting and affecting the heroic and responsible work of more than 100,000 peacekeepers deployed to various missions, some of whom sacrifice their lives in fulfilling their mandates.

I would like to conclude by saying that without prejudice to the fact that the General Assembly is addressing this timely and justifiably important issue in plenary today, Uruguay would like to stress how important it is that the forums functioning in the area, such as the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and the Fifth Committee, continue their work on the subject.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank the President for convening today's meeting. It is highly necessary to include Member States in an in-depth discussion of the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers, and I would like to thank the Egyptian delegation for its initiative.

United Nations peacekeeping is now in its seventieth year. Several hundred thousand peacekeepers have participated in this noble enterprise of maintaining peace for humankind. More than 3,000 have sacrificed

their lives in fulfilling their missions. They fulfil the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations through their concrete action and tireless efforts to safeguard international peace and security, bringing hope to people in areas of conflict and war. Their contribution and sacrifices will live on forever in the memories of people all over the world.

In recent years, a very small number of peacekeepers have committed acts of sexual exploitation and abuse in some countries, seriously damaging peacekeeping's reputation and the image of the United Nations as a whole. China supports the international community's efforts to take comprehensive measures to address the issue properly.

First, we should maintain a zero-tolerance policy on the issue with regard to peacekeepers. We should protect the reputation of the United Nations, ensure that peacekeeping activities develop in a healthy way and take strict measures to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse. When setting relevant norms and laying down guidelines for conduct, the Secretariat should expand its coordination and communication with Member States, and with troop-contributing countries (TCCs) in particular, so as to ensure that peacekeepers deployed to mission areas behave ethically, abide strictly by laws and disciplinary rules and respect local populations.

Secondly, peacekeepers' accountability with regard to claims of sexual exploitation and abuse should be improved. The TCCs should strengthen discipline and accountability. The Security Council and other organs, the Secretariat, TCCs and host countries should strengthen their cooperation in that regard. Non-United Nations forces authorized under a Security Council mandate and the relevant countries should do the same in disciplining their own troops. The Secretariat should provide assistance to TCCs in taking comprehensive measures during all stages of peacekeeping deployment, in order to prevent and combat such acts.

Thirdly, we must take an integrated approach to ensuring the healthy development of peacekeeping operations. The Secretariat has an important responsibility for improving peacekeeping deployment and management. China supports Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the Secretariat in applying concrete measures in the search for appropriate solutions. The Security Council, the General Assembly and its relevant committees should coordinate their efforts in accordance with their respective mandates. The Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, as a policy-deliberating body for peacekeeping, can play a greater role.

Fourthly, attention should be given to building the capacity of troop-contributing countries. The international community should fully consider the difficulties faced by TCCs, particularly developing countries, and build their capacities. All sides should use bilateral and multilateral channels to enhance cooperation with TCCs, provide greater technical assistance and personnel training, and help TCCs improve predeployment training and the quality of their troops, as well as their management, in order to ensure that those who participate in peacekeeping operations are highly disciplined and competent and are able to perform important tasks, thereby improving the overall performance of peacekeeping operations.

Peacekeeping is a common cause for all Member States and plays an important role in safeguarding international and regional peace and security. The international community should recognize the important contributions made by TCCs and numerous peacekeepers to United Nations peacekeeping operations, and work jointly to maintain the good reputation of peacekeeping operations. The international community should also attach importance to, and support, peacekeeping operations so that they can continue to progress.

Mr. Okwudili (Nigeria): I thank President Lykketoft for organizing this timely debate. Sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers has become an issue of grave concern as this unwholesome conduct damages the integrity of the United Nations peacekeeping efforts. We commend the untiring efforts of the Secretary-General to address this issue and the implementation of the zero-tolerance policy for sexual exploitation and abuse.

We applaud the expanded system established by the Secretariat to vet all individuals being deployed as members of military contingents and formed police units for prior misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse while in the service of the United Nations. This measure has occasioned a drop in reported cases of sexual exploitation and abuse from 69 in 2015 to 44 thus far in 2016.

The best policies require inclusive and collective implementation to achieve the desired objective. Efforts to end sexual exploitation and abuse must be our mutual

responsibility and should not be left to the Secretariat alone. Member States must take the lead in seeking measures to effectively tackle this challenge. That requires Member States to commit to preventing acts of sexual exploitation and abuse by our peacekeeping personnel. Concerted efforts must be made to avert a situation whereby the salutary efforts of our Blue Helmets are discredited due to the inappropriate conduct of a few peacekeepers.

We urge expeditious investigation and prosecution of sexual exploitation and abuse offenders and the adoption of measures and an operational environment that lower peacekeepers' inclination towards sexual exploitation and abuse. That will require training and orientation programmes, increased participation of women in peacekeeping missions and the exclusion of perpetrators of sexual exploitation and abuse in all United Nations missions. Member States must embark on dedicated efforts to stem sexual exploitation and abuse offences by their peacekeeping personnel. The peace we seek cannot be achieved if we allow the reputations of our troops to be tarnished by the indiscretions of a few.

In concluding, I wish to underscore the importance of remedial action for victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. We laud the community-based complaint reception mechanism that has been deployed so that sexual exploitation and abuse victims can use confidential and trusted avenues to report sexual exploitation. The mechanism is already operational in seven peacekeeping missions. In that connection, we urge predetermined contributions to the trust fund established to provide health care, psychological support, legal assistance and material needs such as food, clothing and shelter to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Mr. Misra (India): We are grateful to President Lykketoft for convening this debate on strengthening the United Nations system, with reference to sexual exploitation and abuse. United Nations peacekeeping is the most prominent and visible pillar of the United Nations. India, as one of its oldest and largest contributors, remains fully committed to the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse and has implemented numerous proactive measures to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse incidents. India was also the first country to contribute to the trust fund on sexual exploitation and abuse.

We appreciate the need to establish guidelines and policies to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations peacekeeping through a collective and holistic discussion between the Secretariat, the Security Council and the Member States. The troop- and police-contributing countries need to be a part of any formulation on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse in order to achieve a practical and implementable policy.

We also reiterate that troop- and police-contributing countries have the primary responsibility over the conduct and discipline of their personnel, including the investigations of allegations of Sexual exploitation and abuse. The requirements of each Member State's national procedures of jurisdiction must be respected and understood by all parties. Finally, a collective effort should be aimed at preventing sexual exploitation and abuse by identifying and addressing its root causes and implications.

Mr. De Aguiar Patriota (Brazil): Let me start by thanking the President of the General Assembly for convening this meeting and reiterating Brazil's support for the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. It is extremely important to address the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse collectively, by the wider membership, with troop- and police-contributing countries taking the lead in the implementation of measures to ensure proper accountability for such offenses.

The General Assembly is responsible for creating the necessary guidance for the Secretariat to implement a zero-tolerance policy, including by setting concrete guidelines and criteria on preventive and remedial action and avoiding a culture of impunity within the United Nations. In that regard, the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations should continue to play a central role in the implementation of a zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. Efforts should focus on prevention and address root causes and risk factors, such as long rotation periods for troops, decrease in wellness and recreational activities, proximity to civilian sites, and inadequate predeployment training.

Troop- and police-contributing countries have the primary responsibility with regard to the conduct and discipline of their personnel and to the investigations of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. It is therefore fundamental to respect due process and take into consideration the national legislation of Member States. We encourage further extensive and meaningful

consultation among Security Council members, the Secretariat and troop- and police-contributing countries focusing on best practices and lessons learned.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): Let me begin by thanking President Lykketoft for convening this meeting on sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers, which has increasingly become a matter of serious concern.

As one of the leading contributors of troops to United Nations peacekeeping operations, Ethiopia wishes to once again reiterate its full and unwavering commitment to the zero-tolerance policy of the Secretary-General on sexual exploitation and abuse. Our peacekeepers are provided with the necessary predeployment training, including on sexual exploitation and abuse. We continue to exert efforts aimed at addressing possible risk factors that may lead to such cases, and whenever we receive any report of sexual misconduct by our peacekeepers, we are determined to carry out the necessary investigation and take appropriate measures accordingly. However, we wish to take this opportunity to raise a couple of points that we believe need to be looked into as we strive to address the problem.

First, allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse are extremely serious and should be based on verifiable facts. But our own limited experiences have shown us that some of those allegations do not meet the minimum evidentiary standard. That is a matter that should be seriously examined because those allegations are already tarnishing the image of not only troop- and police-contributing countries but the United Nations in general.

Secondly, the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers should be looked at in a comprehensive manner with a view to addressing the root causes. That can be done only with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders including, and most importantly, the troop- and police-contributing countries. Without their active engagement, whatever solution that we may envisage cannot address the problem at its core.

Thirdly, the General Assembly is indeed the appropriate forum in which to discuss the matter and find a comprehensive solution to the problem. Our discussion today is only just the beginning, and the relevant intergovernmental committees — and most importantly the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations — should further deliberate on the matter and make the appropriate recommendations on the way forward.

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh): We thank President Lykketoft for convening this meeting in response to the request of Egypt on behalf of a number of troop- and police-contributing countries, including Bangladesh.

Bangladesh contributes to the United Nations peacekeeping missions to internationally uphold certain values and principles that we cherish as a nation. Allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers run contrary to those principles and cannot be tolerated. We therefore appreciate the urgency attached to addressing such allegations. The trust, confidence and respect that our peacekeepers have earned over decades cannot be compromised by the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse, for those hosting our peacekeepers must not feel vulnerable to the people whom they consider to be their custodians of peace.

In line with our firm zero-tolerance approach to sexual exploitation and abuse by our peacekeepers, we recognize the need to address this scourge in a decisive and sustained manner. The various layers of screening, oversight and monitoring being introduced should help to further strengthen the firewall against such aberrations. In the case of any such allegation and occurrence, the importance of appropriate accountability and sound investigation cannot be overemphasized. Disciplinary and criminal justice and measures in line with corresponding national legislation need to be enforced and reported with due diligence. Remedial action in support of victims in the case of proven allegations is a non-derogable responsibility.

The Secretary-General has positively identified certain underlying factors for the occurrence of sexual exploitation and abuse, beyond some random allegations. It is our shared responsibility to support the Secretary-General to address those factors to the extent possible. While such factors in no way create a pretext for such allegations, it is important that the lessons learned from various contexts be captured in an objective fashion and appropriate response strategies be devised through consultations with all concerned at the field level. At Headquarters, it is critical that sexual exploitation and abuse issues be made part of triangular consultations involving the Security Council, the troop- and police- contributing countries and the Secretariat.

Against the backdrop of the momentum created for addressing the challenge, we note that discussions are taking place in various forums in line with their respective mandates. That may, however, preclude the possibility of working out a well-calibrated and cohesive narrative through the interface of these various bodies. We therefore see merit in the suggestion to have regular, all-encompassing discussions on the subject, under the purview of the General Assembly and with the involvement of the wider membership. Such meetings should also be the forum for sharing any relevant Secretariat documents and guidelines with a view to enhancing transparency and ownership across the board.

We need to recognize that addressing sexual exploitation and abuse is an objective that would not be served through publicity and sensationalism. That overarching need for maintaining strict oversight and compliance would primarily be served through well-designed and rigorous predeployment training; sound, early and credible investigations; and effective prosecution in accordance with applicable national legal provisions. All those would require clear standard-setting, transparent and inclusive dialogue, and sustained investment in capacity-building when there are such needs. As has been articulated a number of times, it would be counterproductive to take an approach of collective punishment for the misconduct and crimes of certain individuals.

The media and other partners also need to be sensitized to the importance of upholding the image and credibility of peacekeeping missions while demanding accountability.

Mr. Makharoblishvili (Georgia): At the outset, allow me to join others in welcoming the decision to convene this meeting under agenda item 122, "Strengthening of the United Nations system", on the critical issue of addressing sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeeping personnel.

We believe that today's debate will contribute substantially to strengthening the United Nations and supporting peacekeeping goals that we aim to achieve collectively. Let me stress that Georgia has significant experience as a contributor to international security and stability through providing military contingents as part of peace operations in different parts of the world. Despite the fact that 20 per cent of our territory remains under illegal foreign occupation and hundreds of thousands of Georgian internally displaced persons and refugees — the victims of ethnic cleansing — are denied the right to return to their homes, we remain committed to international peace efforts throughout the world.

In 2014, a Georgian military contingent took part in the operation in the Central African Republic, led by the European Union (EU), the aim of which was to support regional and international efforts to restore stability to the country and to promote a process of political transformation. In 2015, Georgia continued its participation in the EU-led missions in the Central African Republic and Mali. Georgia remains one of the largest non-NATO troop contributors to the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan. Georgian military personnel have proudly served in Iraq and the Balkans.

As we continue to look for ways to enhance support to international peacekeeping and to make it more efficient and result-oriented, we support addressing current challenges in a comprehensive and transparent way, including in the response to the crimes of sexual exploitation and abuse allegedly committed by peacekeepers. Georgia acknowledges the centrality of protecting civilians and attaches great importance to the safety of population as a critical component of stability, security and sustainable peace. In that regard, Georgia is fully committed to a zero-tolerance policy for sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping and to ensuring the full accountability of perpetrators.

We believe that peacekeeping is also about trust. In that regard, the Georgian Government and the Georgian armed forces quickly reacted to the allegations voiced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in January regarding cases of the sexual abuse of minors by members of foreign military forces in the Central African Republic so as to ensure an exemplary response in terms of promptness and readiness to conduct investigation. The Minister of Defence of Georgia responded to the report by immediately issuing a statement condemning any violence against the local civilian population and highlighted the importance of the timely and proper investigation of the matter, She called for accountability to be upheld and for administrative measures to be taken if the crimes were proved. In addition, the Minister of Defence of Georgia issued an order creating an inter-agency investigation team. The activities of the team were coordinated at the highest level, and its visit to the Central African Republic was approved by the Government of Georgia.

The Minister of Defence of Georgia communicated the willingness of the Government of Georgia to properly and adequately investigate the allegations by creating an inter-agency investigation team and by planning a visit to Bangui, to include the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the European Union Military Committee, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, representatives of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the Executive Director of UNICEF and the Legal Director of Médecins Sans Frontières. In her communications, the Minister voiced her concern about the allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse and asked for the engagement of relevant parties in the investigation process by assigning respective protection of civilian advisers on the ground, while requesting full access of the inter-agency investigation team to the available documentation.

To ensure a well-coordinated and successful process of investigating sexual exploitation and abuse, the inter-agency team included the representatives of national law enforcement, international human rights and child protective services, including a senior investigators of major criminal cases from the Military Police, the Department of Special Affairs, a lieutenant-colonel from the General Inspection Service of the Special affairs at the Ministry of Defense of Georgia, a prosecutor from the Prosecutor General's Office of Georgia, international legal and human rights expert, psychologists and interpreters.

In June, the inter-agency team travelled to the Central African Republic to conduct the investigation. The members of the group carried out their inquiry and attended the process of interrogating the alleged victims and identifying the perpetrators. During the visit to the Central African Republic, the investigative group closely cooperated with local and international organizations, including EU Military Advisory Mission, MINUSCA and UNICEF. The United Nations agencies acknowledged the team as highly professional and as setting an example for other countries.

The materials collected during the visit to the Central African Republic — including protocols, reports and other legal documents — were brought to Georgia and are being carefully studied. At this stage, according to the preliminary data collected by the investigation, no sign of Georgian soldiers' involvement in the crime has been revealed. Should the results of the investigation prove them innocent, Georgia would welcome public denunciation of the allegations, as this is of great importance to our national honour, which has been earned by serving with the highest standards of ethical conduct and even at the cost of the precious lives of Georgian personnel.

In conclusion, I would like to stress our hope that the aforementioned measures undertaken by the Government of Georgia will become a part of systemic and sustained change at the United Nations in dealing with the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse more seriously than we have in the past.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate. The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 122.

Programme of work

The Acting President: I should like to consult members regarding the closing date of the seventieth session of the General Assembly.

Members will recall that at its 2nd plenary meeting, on 18 September 2015, the General Assembly approved the recommendation of the General Committee that the Assembly close on Monday, 12 September 2016. Members are aware that in accordance with resolution 52/214 A and decision 52/468, 12 September 2016 has been designated as an official holiday at United Nations Headquarters for the observance of Eid al-Adha.

In this regard, I would like to propose to the Assembly that it postpone the date of closing of the seventieth session to Tuesday, 13 September. If there is no objection, may I take it that the Assembly agrees to postpone the date of closing of the seventieth session to Tuesday, 13 September?

It was so decided

The Acting President: I would like to take this opportunity to inform members that the closing plenary meeting of the seventieth session will be held at 3 p.m. on Tuesday, 13 September, in the Hall. Immediately thereafter, the General Assembly will declare open the seventy-first session and convene the 1st meeting of the seventy-first session.

I would like to inform members that, in order to allow for a smooth proceeding of the two meetings, the

General Assembly Hall will have the seating protocol of the seventy-first session as of 3 p.m. Therefore, the delegation of the Plurinational State of Bolivia will occupy the first seat in the Hall.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.